

PA EDUCATION FUNDING REFORM CAMPAIGN

The Education Policy and Leadership Center

Good Schools Pennsylvania

Education Law Center

Education Advocates Applaud Costing-Out Study; *Encourage Lawmakers to Use Study for Crafting New School Funding Formula*

Harrisburg, Pa., November 14 – After years of theories, guesses and estimates, Pennsylvanians finally have an answer to the question of what it takes to provide a high quality education to every student, as today the State Board of Education unveiled the results of a statewide costing-out study on Pennsylvania’s public education system.

The costing-out analysis found that \$12,057 is the average level of funding required to ensure that every student reaches state standards of academic achievement. The study identified a base cost per student of \$8,003 and the additional funding needed to close the achievement gap for students in poverty, English language learners and children with special needs. The base cost amount was also adjusted to further close the resource gap for districts that are growing, rural or faced with other educational challenges. Overall, the study found, 474 out of 501 school districts in Pennsylvania are currently spending below their adequacy levels, and Pennsylvania’s system of public education is underfunded by \$4.61 billion (26.8 percent more than current spending).

The Pennsylvania study reinforces the assertion made by education advocates that too many schools districts in Pennsylvania are not receiving the funding needed to ensure that students receive a high quality education. The study also notes that additional revenues to improve student performance should be collected at the state level and allocated through a formula that takes into account factors such as inflation, changes in student demographics, and the resources needed to help all students meet Pennsylvania’s performance expectations and academic standards.

“Educators and policymakers understand that all students need small class sizes in early grades, highly qualified teachers, a challenging curriculum, safe facilities, and other basic elements in order to be successful,” said Janis Risch, executive director of Good Schools Pennsylvania, whose organization, along with the Education Law Center and The Education Policy and Leadership Center, are promoting a campaign to strengthen the way Pennsylvania funds public education. “But the missing piece in ensuring successful schools is a sound statewide school funding system.”

In examining the equity of the current school finance system for students and taxpayers, the study found that districts with the greatest student need generate the least local revenue per pupil, despite the fact that they typically make a greater tax effort than districts with more wealth. These inequities are not sufficiently addressed by state aid under the current funding system.

While the costing-out study examines the cost of education per student and the impact of local tax effort, it does not propose a new formula for distribution of state aid. That, advocates say, is the work still to be done by the General Assembly.

“The costing-out study establishes a starting point for creating an accountable system of public education that aligns state academic standards with the appropriate resources needed to ensure a high quality education,” said Ron Cowell, president of The Education Policy and Leadership Center. “A new funding plan needs to increase the state share of public education costs and eliminate the unfair inequities in educational opportunities available to students across the 501 school districts in Pennsylvania.”

Education advocates stress that Governor Rendell and the General Assembly have the responsibility to act quickly and boldly to implement the findings and recommendations of the costing-out study and to provide the resources needed to fully support Pennsylvania’s students. They also applaud the recent efforts of State Representatives John Siptroth (D-189) and Beverly Mackereth (R-196), who recently introduced House Resolution 460, a proposal to establish a Joint Legislative Commission on Public School Finance. If adopted, the proposal would create a 41-member commission composed of policymakers, business and nonprofit organization leaders, and professional educators charged with using the results of the costing-out study to craft a new funding formula for Pennsylvania’s public school system.

“We are optimistic that the Legislative Commission can be a vehicle for moving the costing-out study forward by creating broadly supported recommendations for a new statewide funding system based on the principles of adequacy, accountability, equity, efficiency and predictability,” said Baruch Kintisch, staff attorney with the Education Law Center.

“The success of our students, the health of our communities and the prosperity of the entire commonwealth are at stake,” said Risch. “The costing-out study lays the groundwork for the General Assembly to enact systemic funding reform and establish Pennsylvania as a leader in public education.”

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www.eplc.org: Access recent survey of public opinion on public education and a summary of how costing-out studies have been used in other states.

www.goodschoolspa.org: Access fact sheets and recent media reports on the costing-out study.

www.elc-pa.org: Access fact sheets pertaining to the needs of students with special needs.
